of the Union army through Wilmington will live forever in the memory of the colored people" as black troops marched proudly past jubilant spectators who danced in the street and exclaimed that their salvation had arrived. [7]

The Civil War ended a few months after the fall of Wilmington with the surrender of the Confederacy in April 1865. North Carolina was left in upheaval as former soldiers returned to war-damaged homes, some still occupied by federal troops. White men and women from all economic backgrounds faced rebuilding their homes and farms, and plantation owners faced a workforce shortage with the loss of slave labor.[8] For the newly freed African American population, emancipation brought a life of hope mixed with uncertainty. Most owned no land, and many were displaced from family and homes they knew before the war. Thousands migrated to other parts of the state to find work and stability in their freedom. Many whites sought to preserve the prewar norms of white leadership and black subservience. Others believed that only through the intervention of federal authorities—a process that has become known as Reconstruction—would safety and equality for freed slaves be assured.[9]

## Wilmington's Social and Class Structure

In 1860, there were many distinct types of people living and working in Wilmington based upon a time honored system of social hierarchy and wealth. The individual groups survived the ravages of the war albeit with redefined positions within Wilmington's civic and social life. By the late antebellum period, the largest and most prosperous plantations were owned by men who had inherited their property and wealth from long lines of Cape Fear planters. These men and women inherited wealth and an intricate philosophy of life—a worldview that placed them at the top of the socioeconomic pyramid.[10] This "stable, hereditary, cultivated gentry" was involved closely with politics and the social life of the state.[11] At the top of the pyramid was the traditional elite, whose living was based on plantation slavery and inherited status. The elite members of Wilmington society maintained their connections to inland plantations and often intermarried. As a result, by the time of the first shots at Fort Sumter, these men and women were closely connected and supportive of each other.[12] Within the gentry class were planters, men who owned 20 or more slaves.

[7] Noah A. Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 363-365.

[8] Paul Escott, "White Republicanism and Ku Klux Klan Terror: The North Carolina Piedmont During Reconstruction," in Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, and Charles Flynn, Jr., *Race, Class, and Politics in Southern History: Essays in Honor of Robert F. Durden* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 15-17.

[9] An overview of the destruction wrought by the Civil War on North Carolina's economy, physical environment and citizens can be found in John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* and *North Carolina as a Civil War Battleground*; Watford, Christopher M., *The Civil War in North Carolina: Soldiers' and Civilians' Letters and Diaries, 1861-*

*1865*; and Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era.*

[10] For reading on antebellum upper class elite mindsets, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) and John B. Boles, ed., *A Companion to the American South*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

[11] Jerome McDuffie, *Politics in Wilmington and New Hanover County, North Carolina, 1865-1900 The Genesis of a Race Riot* PhD. Dissertation, Kent State University (1979) 31-32. Many of the state's political leaders could trace their family roots to the Cape Fear region.

[12] Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails,* 9.